

Tahoe roads less friendly to criminals post-Dugard



Lt. Les Lovell
- - changes
were made
after Jaycee
Lee Dugard was
kidnapped.

Photo/Lisa J.
Tolda

By Kathryn Reed

Code 50 – it was not in the vocabulary of law enforcement until after Jaycee Lee Dugard was kidnapped.

Her abduction in June 1991 soon led to the establishment of a collaborative policy that allows officers throughout the South Shore to work together to locate a suspect's vehicle.

“We can cordon off the South Shore. We do that by strategically placing patrol cars at undisclosed locations,” explained Lt. Les Lovell of the El Dorado County Sheriff's Department.

It's possible Highway 50 could be completely shutdown, with no access out of the basin. Roadblocks and searches are dependent on the nature of the crime.

No one will ever know if Code 50 had been in place June 10, 1991, if the vehicle containing then 11-year-old Dugard would have been stopped.

“In 1991, we put people out as strategically as we could with the resources we had that day. We couldn’t cover everything,” Lovell said.

Those outside of law enforcement said the reaction time was slow – that it took a couple hours to start searching for vehicles. (It takes three hours to get from South Tahoe to Antioch, where the suspects took Dugard.)

Joining El Dorado County in the partnership are California and Nevada highway patrols, South Lake Tahoe Police Department, and Douglas County Sheriff’s Office.

Technology has changed in the last 18 years, too. This helps the perpetrators as well as law enforcement.

Amber Alerts now exist. Signs on highways throughout the basin can and have posted vehicle license plate numbers and descriptions of vehicles for other motorists to look out for.

Officers have computers and cell phones with which to communicate with each other.

GPS, MapQuest and the like are tools that can aid suspects. Those devices can help them avoid major thoroughfares.

That is one reason Lovell says officers won’t be stationed just on the obvious roads.

Lovell said Code 50 has been used several times in the last 18 years. A memorable, though tragic time, was for 9-year-old Krystal Steadman in March 2000. Her body was eventually found dumped on Spooner Summit.